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Waiting on Grandma

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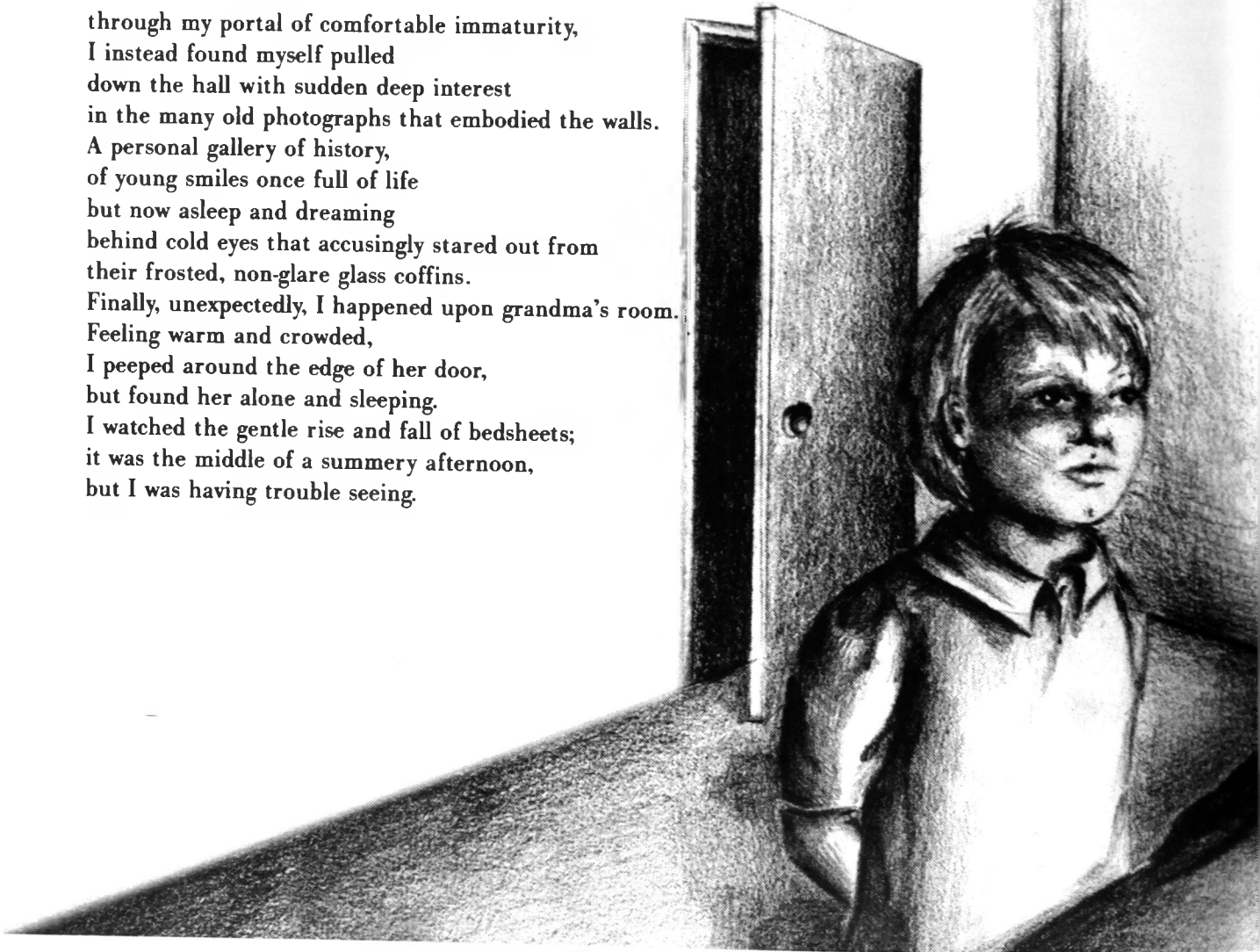

Waiting on Grandma

We took smaller steps when walking
with grandma. Spoke a little slower, louder.
Listened a little harder.

It was afternoon with good-byes said and I was ready to go.
My mother and Aunt Pat talked in the kitchen
over coffee about anything but leaving.

I waited down the hall
anxious in my youthful skin
to be anywhere else
than right there,
right then.

A light fell from grandma's room filtered through burnt-orange curtains
smothering the room in a rust colored tinge and into the hall past her partially opened door.
I listened, strained, but heard nothing
that sounded like leaving.
Yearning to flee,
to retreat
through my portal of comfortable immaturity,
I instead found myself pulled
down the hall with sudden deep interest
in the many old photographs that embodied the walls.
A personal gallery of history,
of young smiles once full of life
but now asleep and dreaming
behind cold eyes that accusingly stared out from
their frosted, non-glare glass coffins.
Finally, unexpectedly, I happened upon grandma's room.
Feeling warm and crowded,
I peeped around the edge of her door,
but found her alone and sleeping.
I watched the gentle rise and fall of bedsheets;
it was the middle of a summery afternoon,
but I was having trouble seeing.



There was darkness present
and it felt much later than it was.
I could almost caress her soft fleshy face
under my gaze, and had I ventured to do so,
felt the warmth of her cheek on my lips
as I bent to kiss her tenderly
as I would a sleeping child.
But I did not, could not. Afraid
my touch would melt away her thin vein of dreams
and leave me
to face what was left behind.

Perhaps it was my shifting carelessness,
or perhaps that other dreamer
that alerted her to my presence wrapped around her door,
for her failing eyes suddenly snapped open, suddenly clear,
trapped me with a distant dreamer's gaze.
I stood motionless as a voyeur undone;
an intruder imposing upon the sanctity of that bidding peace.
A sudden wave of embarrassment,
 of transgression,
crashed over me.
A riptide of humility pulled me under,
drug me back down the hall,
past nightmarish *I told you so* faces,
and into a world of air,
and breath,
and idle chatter,
and waiting.

by Brent A. Baldwin

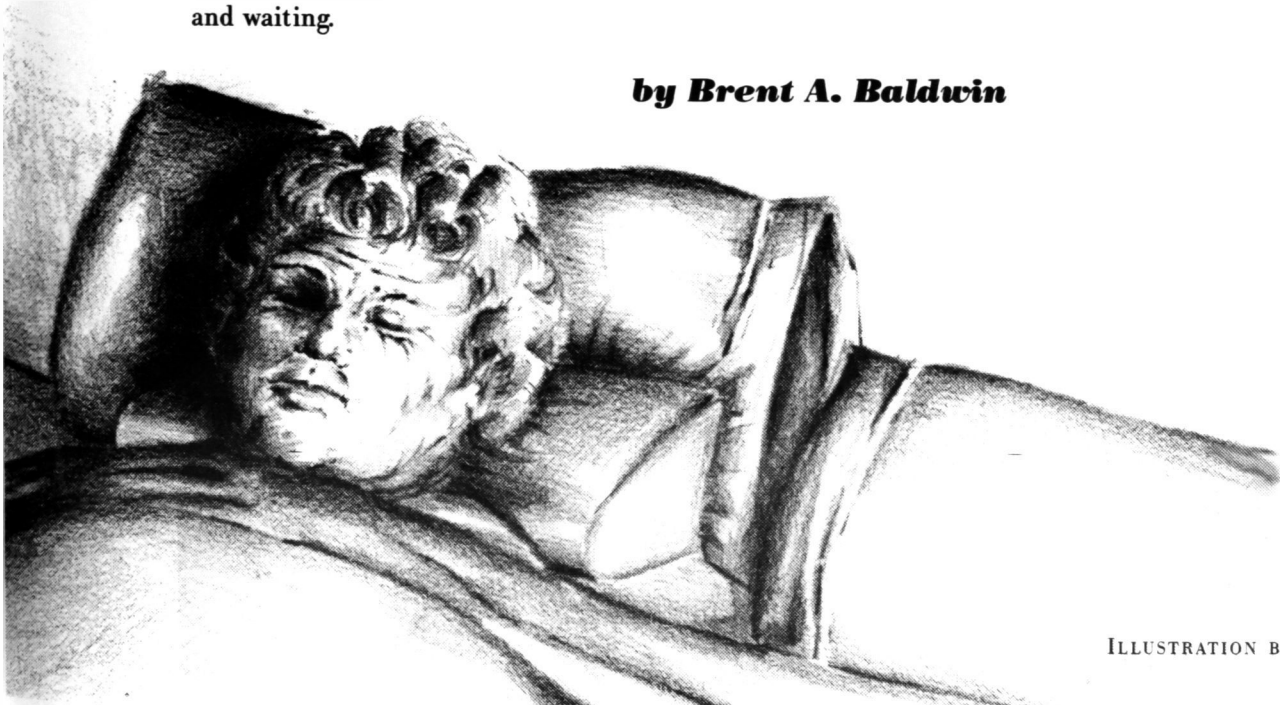


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